

I Never Thought I Would Outlive You.

Another Melancholy Day

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Letter to my Brothers,

I never thought I would outlive any of you--it never crossed my mind. Not a day passes without one of you popping up in my daily thoughts. Vietnam. Da Nang. Dog handlers, mostly. And we still had fun, and made fond memories—and memories not so fun.

Remember the night we got off duty, put our dogs away, and caught a ride to Tent City? The morning cool was nudging 90. After chow hall we were back to our tent—sun just rising a blazing orb that blistered the canvas tent's walls guaranteeing sleep was impossible; way too oppressive a baking heat to sleep. We went outside to our bunker and sat in the shade Bs'ing, dozing, and crawling around the bunker following the shade—high noon robbed us of even that. Then sarge caught us out in the open and scooped us up to fortify and fill sandbags; somebodies got to do it and it's you's...or something like that. Funny think was drove us over to the kennels and said the President wanted us to participate in the new Vietnam Beautiful Program and plant flowers around the K9 office.

Bouncing in the back of the deuce-n'half, we were all royally...*upset*, exhausted, and poor-mouthing 'Why Us?' And then someone started giggling and it was contagious and hilarious because of all the above. The plotting began.

Sarge, presented us with about five bags of flower seeds, and told us to dig small holes all around the base of the office, put in a couple of seeds, cover it up leaving a water basin around each one. His mistake was telling his he had an errand to run and would be back in an hour or so and expected it to all be done.

It was. The plotting began.

We dug the little holes spaced about a foot and half apart, with water basins and then on the last hole, we dug one about two feet deep and dumped all the seeds in it. We filled all the basins with water and sacked out inside the office building. Sarge returned ready to break heads but was instead very pleased with our hard work and knew LTC Phillips would be too.

Instead of giving us a ride back to our tent, he told us we should all be bushy-tailed from our naps and to hump it back. We were in a great mood over our little green-thumb revenge.

Sometime later, sarge wondered aloud why no flowers ever grew at the kennels—*we did such a great job and all*. I told him I thought the reason was all that Vietnam crappy soil and the Vietnamese using it for toilets. He thought about it and said that sounded about right.

Many other fun things happened; and bad things, along the way. Sgt. Jensen was KIA in July, and in January, JB Jones was KIA. Woodward later and another guy. Maxie couldn't handle that JB was killed and was sent back home. He disappeared. Later, there were ten or so other deaths at Da Nang; a couple of new guys got sick and died within 1-5 days of arrival, dying on the hospital ships in the harbor—we never met them or even knew their names for years—and one or two drowned. I DEROS'd and gradually so did you all.

Three decades passed, and then you started dying. Phil Norwich passed away in 1997, heart attack and AO related. We didn't know that may of us were *killed in Vietnam* by Agent Orange that would follow us home to finish the job. Tom Baker, 2007; Gary Eberbach, 2017; Gary Knutson, 2020. And yes, there were

others. And when I go for walks, I sometimes feel your shadows in memories, and smile at some; tearing at others. I'm old, you know, and a great-grandpa now.

Brotherhood is not a club to veterans. I can still see your faces and hear some of your voices in my dreams. I've often wonder if our dogs went to heaven. If the lion will lay down with the sheep in peace, I think there may be a place for Blackie, Rex, Eric, Lucky, King, and all the others.

None of us left Vietnam as we had arrived. We were changed and Vietnam couldn't be undone. We remember you each day, each night, in our hearts, in our minds, in our souls. It will always be so this side of The Wall. Our Brotherhood will someday have crossed over to the other side, and once there, maybe we could plant some flowers.

Don Poss